

ATTENTION GETS ACTION: IT'S AN ABSOLUTE ----- ELLIOTT #1902

It's comforting, and not only to rightists, that "There aren't any absolutes any longer" is wrong. The old physical law that "Every action begets an equal and opposite reaction" has its psychophysiological and psychosociological counterparts both - (as opposites) and + (as reinforcements)....Some thoughts on this deathday of Daddy King (12 Nov 84):

1. To our blessed advantage, American politics go radical in both directions at approx. the same time, and we tolerate this mess because (1) we are, thank God, squeamish about killing off the losers and (2) we have the past and present benefit of taking seriously the worse mess made when a people goes radical at only one end, left (as, now, Leninist Nicaragua) or right (as anytime-anywhere fascism): the teetertotter thuds to the ground and the game is (temporarily) over. But the current left/right USA political spread is too wide; ideologues at both ends are strident and resentful. We Democrats can make a comeback if we so reconstruct as to be seen as moderates who can both satisfy and tame a rainbow coalition, the alternative being an enervating war of the outs against the ins (which would split me, as I'm materially in and spiritually out).

2. Two other developments on this, Daddy King's deathday:

(1) The UN Gen. Assembly, under Soviet bloc pressure, declared peace (by 92-0!) a "sacred right," "the ultimate human right." Ireland objected that this action was in violation of the UN Charter, which affirms every nation's right of defense. The Western bloc abstained, largely on the ground that the action was a toothless illusion and propaganda ploy. Attention to "peace," though, gets action--though not necessarily action that moves the world toward peace.

(2) The US RC bishops began discussion of Abp. Weakland's committee's economics draft. I've seen only summaries, agree with almost everything, and wish the language could be scrubbed of socialist rhetoric so that attackers would have to deal with the substance instead of only being able to divert attention to the style. But three cheers: attention will get action! We have been slipping backward into theory-comfortable capitalism with robber-baron overtones (as, e.g., nothing has been done to halt the six forces increasing the tax burden on the economically lower half of our people). A countervailing fact: in the past eight years, we've created 27,000,000 new jobs.

3. Selective attention tends to get only selective action. Nothing gets done without focusing attention, and everything gets distorted when the focusing narrows down (long-lens) to single-issue-ism (in politics, religion, theology, or anything else). Maturity, sophistication, can focus for action while not losing field, context, perspective (wide-angle-lens)....Single-issue-ism commits the hubris of claiming the sacred as its domain. Geraldine Ferraro was condemned by a coalition of 18 Northeasterern RC bishops because she locates the sacred both in the fetus and in freedom, instead of only in the former, which they affirmed as "the key issue." Libertarians (e.g., ACLU) locate the sacred in individual freedom, and so threaten social order and balance. Liberationists, often allies of libertarians, locate the sacred in "the oppressed," "the poor," to whom God (in Marxists, "history") is giving special attention (indeed, selective attention: God/history are single-issue-oriented!). The Religious Right single-issues on bornagainness, to the neglect of our Enlightenment heritage. The Political Right single-issues on entrepreneurial rights at the expense of human rights, and on self-duties ("character") at the expense of social duties. And the Left, in its various incarnations, single-issues on social control (implicitly, one-party), to the neglect of freedom with its risks and pains and motivations.

4. Attention-in-the-interest-of-TRUTH is theoretical, heuristic, scientific; no progress anywhere without it. But attention-in-the-interest-of-POWER is ideological, inherently blind and arrogant and (at least psychologically) violent. I have given my energies to both kinds of attending, and I'm happier with the results of the former--but still wistful about the latter. My organic question: What, now, is God "attending" to and "attending to"?

"The Bible Calls For Action" is the present NYT Seminary button I'm enthusiastically wearing.